“‘Déyè mòn, gen mòn’: Religious Mediation in the Assimilation of Haitian Immigrants in Miami, Montreal and Paris”

Paper Prepared for the conference
Migration, Religion and Secularism—
A Comparative Approach (Europe and North America),
Sorbonne University and École Normal Supérieure (ENS),

Margarita Mooney, Ph.D.
Department of Sociology and
Office of Population Research
Princeton University
May 24, 2005
margarit@princeton.edu
Introduction

The title of my paper comes from a Haitian proverb that means “beyond the mountain, there is another mountain.” During the two years when I conducted research among Haitians living in Miami, Montreal and Paris, many Haitians I encountered used this proverb to express how migrating and assimilating\textsuperscript{1} into a new country appears as a never-ending mountain hike from their perspective. This proverb also illustrates the essential argument I make in this paper. Although many scholars think of assimilation as immigrants joining the new political community or finding a steady job, I argue that in order to properly conceptualize immigrant assimilation we need to understand the types of associations immigrants themselves create. Among the types of institutions immigrants found, religious institutions provide a common meeting place in which they re-create their culture through shared symbols and rites. The moral authority of religious leaders encourages trust and solidarity to emerge among immigrants. For these reasons, among the myriad of possible kinds of associations immigrants can create, religious institutions help them develop solidarity with a group of peers trying to cross the same mountain en route toward political and labor market incorporation in their new society.

However, internal solidarity alone among members of a religious congregation cannot guide immigrants such as Haitians around the many landslides they encounter on their journey. Religious institutions, when they are connected to networks of service and government institutions, can provide crucial guidance for immigrants in their new societies. To capture this relationship, I develop the concept of mediation, which emphasizes that religious institutions provide an important hub of network connections.

\textsuperscript{1} Some immigration scholars prefer the term integration to assimilation because for some, assimilation has a normative meaning of a one-way adoption of the values of the host society. Although I do not adopt this normative stance, I nonetheless use this term here to imply a complex and multi-generational process.
between individuals, the state, and secular civil society organizations. Because I explore the role of religion in the assimilation of Haitians in three different sites—Miami, Montreal and Paris—I highlight how mediation between civil society institutions and the state differs because of national political traditions.

**Religion, Ethnicity and Immigrant Assimilation**

Much of the early work in American sociology of immigration portrayed religious institutions as a essential facilitator in immigrant assimilation (Gordon 1964; Herberg 1955; Thomas and Znaniecki 1927). A central concept that emerged from American studies of immigrant assimilation is known as “the melting pot,” which emphasizes how, rather than fully acculturating to the host society, immigrants achieve socio-economic mobility precisely by strengthening ethnic ties and even becoming more religious. Religious communities—whether they are Catholic parishes, Protestant congregations, or Jewish synagogues—reinforce ethnic solidarity and provide social services and education that help immigrants achieve occupational and social mobility in the host society. The growing body of contemporary empirical findings regarding immigration and religion in the United States have uncovered that much of the melting pot theory’s stress on religious sources of ethnic solidarity holds true with today’s immigrants to the United States (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Menjívar 1999; Menjívar 2001; Menjívar 2003; Warner and Wittner 1998; Zhou and Bankston 1998). However, because the research on religion and immigration has lacked a cross-national comparative perspective, we are without a theoretical framework for understanding how political contexts shape the role of religion in immigrant assimilation.
Common Immigration Trends, Different Ways of Understand Immigrant Adaptation

Comparing a single group of immigrants in different nations allows me to analyze the interaction between an immigrant group’s characteristics and the conditions in their place of settlement separately. The three countries I analyze—the United States, Canada and France—have high levels of foreign born, 11.5%, 18.4%, and 7.4% (Borrel 2000; Malone et al. 2003; Statistics Canada 2001). In all three countries, immigrants have the right to acquire citizenship after a given number of years of residency and their children automatically become citizens, fostering an openness that should facilitate assimilation. Despite these similarities, the three countries have different national ideologies about ethnicity and religion. The American melting pot and Canadian multiculturalism both view communities to be an important support for immigrants. However, in Canada, through multicultural policies that seek to enshrine ethnic diversity in Canadian institutions, the state plays a role in defining ethnic categories and funding ethnic associations. In the United States, because of its federalist tradition and limited government involvement in cultural affairs, immigrants are left to organize their own communities around ethnic and religious identities, producing the melting pot.

French Republicanism differs greatly from both these North American perspectives on immigrant assimilation. Although scholars and politicians in France continue to debate the exact meaning of Republicanism, many government pronouncements illustrate the strength of Republican ideology in France. For example, in 1993, the Haute Conseil pour l’Intégration, a government commission to study

---

2 In France, children of the foreign-born automatically have the right to acquire French citizenship, but in order to do so, they must request it upon turning 18 years of age.
immigrant assimilation, reasserted Republicanism as a model for “intégration à la française” that emphasizes that “durable community groups do not respond to the profound vocation of our country” (Long and l’Haute Conseil pour l’Intégration 1993, p. 9). As a result of Republican ideology, unlike the United States and Canada, where the government collects data on ethnic groups and supports affirmative action policies, the French state does not formally create special programs for racial or ethnic groups.

Whereas one could say that ideas about immigrant assimilation in Canada and France emphasize the role of the state in providing access to programs and jobs, in the United States, many theories of immigrant assimilation highlight the role of voluntary associations in supporting adaptation. I argue, however, that we should be studying the interaction between the state and civil society—understood as that space outside states and markets comprised of secular and religious voluntary associations.³ One way that the state and civil society interact is through mediating institutions. Berger and Neuhaus define mediating institutions as neighborhood, family, church and voluntary associations that are positioned in between individuals and public institutions (Berger and Neuhaus 2000). Regardless of the share of welfare services provided by the state as compared to voluntary associations, which varies across North America and Europe, a well-functioning democracy relies on these mediating institutions to bridge the gap between the state and individuals. First, mediating institutions generate their own resources—such as volunteer work, informal economic support, and local leadership—that state agencies could not provide. Second, these institutions serve to guide individuals through the

---
³ Political theorists such as Theda Skocpol (2000) and Jean Bethke Elshtain (2000) have argued for this approach emphasizing the complementarity of state and civil society institutions.
process of integration, which includes access to educational, health, and employment programs.

_Haitians in Miami, Montreal and Paris_

Given these important national differences in the role of the state and ethnic groups in immigrant assimilation, I investigate: _How do contexts of reception—such as government policy and host society treatment—influence the mediating role of religion in immigrant adaptation?_

My interest in how national contexts shape the role of religion in immigrant adaptation leads me to study a single national-origin group—Haitians—in three different locations with varying traditions of immigrant assimilation—the United States, Canada and France. Haitian immigrants are a theoretically interesting group to study because they arrive in North America and Europe bearing several characteristics that place them at a distinct social disadvantage vis-à-vis their host society and even other immigrants. First, as Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haitians have lower levels of education and less urban work experience when compared to many other contemporary immigrant groups. Second, despite the fact that Haiti has experienced considerable political turmoil from the early 1980s to the present, including five _coup d’états_, the Haitians who have left as part of the exodus of the last few decades have encountered many difficulties with visas, necessary to immigrate legally or claim refugee or asylum status. A third disadvantage Haitians carry is their race. In the United States, black immigrants face much of the same discrimination as native blacks, often resulting in lower mobility (Alba and Nee 2003; Gordon 1964; Waters 1999). Even though racial divides are stronger in the United States than Canada or France, many black immigrants
in those countries also face more difficult paths to economic adaptation than native whites (Boyd 2005; Simon 2003; Torczyner 2001).

Despite these disadvantages, one potential resource Haitians bring with them to their new host countries is a strong sense of religious solidarity and religious-based social movements. Haitians, like most other Latin Americans, come from a country that is largely Catholic, but Haiti is somewhat unique even in Latin America because the Church has played a powerful role in politics and society, particularly during the struggle for democracy since the 1980s (Dupuy 1989; Dupuy 1997; Nérestant 1994). Although religion is clearly an important factor in Haitian politics and society, we cannot assume that this relationship between religion and society will be transferred to the developed world where the state has a much greater role in society than in Haiti.

Even highly secularized Western countries portray important differences in church-state relations. Since its founding, the United States has stood out among Western democracies for its religious vitality and the strong public role of churches (Tocqueville 1994 [1838]). For example, in the United States, organizations with roots in different religious traditions frequently provide social services, such as education and healthcare, to members of their religious communities and to the public in general. We would not expect religion to be as important a factor for Haitians in Montreal as in Miami because, since the Quiet Revolution in Quebec in the 1960s, the institutional Catholic Church has lost nearly all of its position as a provider of education, health and other social services (LeMieux and Montminy 2002). The French Revolution of 1789 forged a republican, secular state that largely displaced the place of institutional religion in French culture and society.
In the next section, I present the findings of a more than two-year long research project during which I conducted over 170 interviews in Haiti, Miami, Montreal and Paris. In order to gauge the background and socio-economic status of Haitians in the three cities, I also collected census and immigration data on Haitians in each receiving city. Because the Catholic Church is the largest religious institution of Haiti, and because studying the same religious group in different countries would allow me to focus my analysis on how political differences influence the role of religion in assimilation, I conducted ethnographic work at the Haitian Catholic missions of each site. Nonetheless, as I was interested in how religious institutions interact with or differ from other ethnic associations, I interviewed leaders of secular Haitian associations from the social, political, and business realm attended events they sponsored. Attending secular Haitian community events allowed me to understand the broad issues that concern Haitian community leaders, to observe class and gender differences amongst who attends various types of community events, and to conduct interviews with Haitians who may not attend church.

In addition to formal interviews, I spoke informally with hundreds more Haitians I encountered during my two years of fieldwork. Learning Haitian Creole and gaining familiarity with Haitian culture greatly opened the door to allow me to conduct interviews with ordinary immigrants, many of who have experienced discrimination or may not have legal status. My ethnographic work allowed me to observe how religious

---

4 For reasons of space, I only briefly refer to these data here, but they are presented in full in my thesis (Mooney 2005).
5 In each city, my fieldwork coincided with an entire month of activities organized by Haitian community associations to showcase Haitian culture: in Miami, Haitian Cultural Heritage Month (May 2002); in Montreal, International Creole Month (October 2002); and in Paris, Toussaint Louverture Month (March 2003). These month-long celebrations provided me daily opportunities to attend secular Haitian events and visit numerous community associations.
institutions and their leaders accompany immigrants through the various facets of assimilation. Although other writers have noted the cultural and even economic importance of immigrants’ religious communities, Haitians face unusually difficult legal and political challenges to their assimilation, leading me to use the term *mediation.* Rather than conceiving of the church as a structure parallel to the state or strictly in the private sphere, I conceive of the church as part of civil society. Through its mediation, the Church asserts itself as an actor in civil society that seeks both to organize its own members and to influence the government.

Ethnographic data reveal that even though religious institutions are not the only Haitian associations that engage social and political issues in the Haitian communities, they have a unique connection to the grassroots because they provide leaders and institutions necessary for ordinary Haitians to participate in civil society. The multi-site ethnography further demonstrates that the way that Haitians’ cultural schemas are transposed into concrete forms of social action depends on the political context. As I explore more thoroughly in the following sections, in Miami, the Church is an important partner with the government in providing services to Haitians. In Montreal and Paris, Catholic leaders’ attempts to support Haitians’ assimilation are weakened by limited support from outside programs. For an impoverished immigrant group such as Haitians, the lack of complementarity between government and community resources will likely weaken their socio-economic and political assimilation.
Miami: Religious Ties at Notre Dame and Institutional Mediation at the Toussaint Center

Haitians began to migrate to Miami later than to Paris and Montreal yet have still managed to build their largest North American and European population there, which has now grown to 200,000.\textsuperscript{6} The purpose of this paper is not to directly compare measures of Haitians’ assimilation in the three cities, but rather to compare the mechanisms by which Haitians create organizations to support their assimilation. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Haitians in Miami face a unique set of obstacles to their assimilation—including low human capital, repeated efforts of the U.S. government to interdict and return Haitian asylum-seekers, and discrimination against blacks—that have placed them at risk for downward mobility into the American urban underclass (Stepick et al. 2001).

Because Haitians in Miami begin their assimilation with many impediments to finding jobs and legalizing their status, civil society institutions have been crucial to their successful adaptation. Although the Catholic Church is not the only civil society institution in the Haitian community of Miami, the Church plays a unique mediating role. In the geographic center of Miami’s neighborhood known as Little Haiti, the Catholic Church established an all-Haitian Catholic parish, Notre Dame d’Haiti, and built the largest social service center for Haitians in Miami, the Pierre Toussaint Center. These two institutions, which share the same 10-acre property, are not only an important community center for Haitians but also an important mediating structure between Haitians, the state and the market.

\textsuperscript{6} About half of these Haitians live in Miami-Dade County, and the other half are divided between the next two northern counties. As the census generally undercounts immigrants and non-native English speakers, the actual figure for the number of Haitians in South Florida could be twice as high.
Figures 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the theory I develop about the church as a mediating institution in civil society. In Figure 1a, three overlapping circles represent civil society, the state and the market, which I conceive of as inter-dependent spheres. Successful assimilation requires integration into each of these spheres, but as demonstrated by the overlapping circles in the figure, the three spheres are *inter-dependent* rather than independent. Given the centrality of the Catholic Church to political and social life in Haiti, Haitian immigrants who arrive in Miami with little human capital or language skills look for a familiar institution to orient themselves in their new society.

**Figure 1a**

![Figure 1a](image)

Figure 2a illustrates how, for many Haitians in Miami, participating in a church becomes the link that connects them to other civil society institutions, the state, and the market.
Figure 3 elaborates on the specific contributions of two types of religious institutions: communities of worship and religious-based service associations. Within the church community, religious beliefs, narratives and rituals become cultural tools that Haitians use to generate a common identity based on shared aspirations and common moral authority. Because Haitians in Miami face strong stereotypes against their racial and national-origin group, cultural resources become central to creating an ethnic identity and encouraging solidarity. This solidarity does not arise spontaneously from aggregate social ties, but is embedded within a religious institution—the Catholic Church—a place that provides social closure and financial resources for Haitians to organize their own religious community.
The nearly 3,000 Haitians who attend Miami’s Notre Dame once a week or more generate cultural resources, such as shared narratives and notions of human dignity as a child of God. Second, the Catholic Church’s vertical networks to other Catholic institutions provide access to valuable resources outside of the Haitian community, such as leadership, buildings, money. In addition to mobilizing solidarity within the Haitian community and the broader Catholic community, the Church has played an important mediating role for Haitians by advocating that the government provide funding to support adaptation programs for what began as a largely unwelcomed and discriminated immigrant group.

Haitians who attend Notre Dame—even those who regularly attend another Catholic Church but come to Notre Dame for special festivals—refer to Notre Dame as “the heart of the Haitian community” and “our home in Miami.” Beyond its religious functions, Notre Dame has become a symbol of Haitian culture in Miami and a welcoming place for this highly discriminated against ethnic group. In the religious
environment at Notre Dame, clergy often remind Haitians that they have an obligation to other members of the community. Sermons at Notre Dame use Biblical images to demonstrate that Jesus reprimanded even the closest followers of Christ—the original disciples—for failing to be generous. In a sermon in the spring of 2002, Father Reginald Jean-Mary, a Haitian priest in his 30s who is now the pastor of Notre Dame, pointed out that Haitians, even those who attend church, may sometimes act selfishly towards their brothers and sisters:

Sometimes, like Peter, we say, My Lord, I feel good! If today we have been able to buy a little house here in the United States, we forget the people suffering in Haiti. If today we find a job, we say “zafè kabrit pa zafè mouton” (what concerns the goat doesn’t concern the lamb); we trample on other Haitians. If we go somewhere else to get a job, we keep stepping on others so they don’t rise up too because we are comfortable the way we are. Once we find a good position, we feel so good we forget God because we are comfortable where we are.

In this sermon, typical of many sermons at Notre Dame, the clergy exhort Haitians that once they have solved their own problems, they cannot forget the needs of others. Father Jean-Mary encouraged the community to practice reciprocity: if we ask for help but then refuse to help others, we are hypocrites. By emphasizing messages of altruism and reciprocity in their sermons, the clergy use the authority of the Bible and their authority as clergy members to enforce solidarity among Haitian immigrants.

Figure 3 also highlights the importance of the Toussaint Center, which serves as a two-way conduit of resources between the local-level Haitian community and the local, state and federal government. Rather than just conceiving of the church as a local association, scholars have pointed that many local associations belong to federal structures or vertical networks that allow civil society organizations, including churches, to interact with the government (Skocpol, Ganz and Munson 2000). Indeed, part of the
reason the Catholic Church can mediate for Haitians in Miami is because each parish belongs to established networks of other institutions. One reason why the Catholic Church became a mediating structure for Haitians in Miami is because the Catholic Church in the United States has a long history of institutional altruism, or philanthropy, much of which has been geared to the needs of immigrants (Oates 1995).

Volunteer workers and clergy and lay leaders of Notre Dame launched the Toussaint Center as a nonprofit association to more directly provide services to all Haitians, including those outside their religious community. The Toussaint Center has draw on existing network ties to the Archdiocese of Miami and Catholic Charities, which supply buildings, money and knowledge of local political affairs that have allowed the Toussaint Center to expand its activities. Leaders of the Toussaint Center mediate between the immigrant group and the state in two ways: 1) by seeking outside funding for social programs and 2) by advocating for the legal and social rights of a marginalized immigrant group. In addition, Bishops of the Catholic Church directly lobbied both local and national political officials for more fair treatment of Haitians in asylum policy (Miller 1984).

The Toussaint Center has been a successful bridge between Haitians and their host environment for more than 20 years because even those Haitians who do are not Catholic or do not attend any church are more likely to trust the leaders and staff of a faith-based nonprofit more than a stage agency. However, the Toussaint Center is not the only Haitian community association in Miami, and its leaders refer its clients—whether they are members of Notre Dame or not—to other secular Haitian associations or government agencies that have appropriate services for them. Because the Toussaint
Center combines resources from the institutional Catholic Church and the state—funding, physical space, social services, and political advocacy—these resources can more efficiently reach the neediest Haitians.

The hostility with which Haitians were first received in Miami created a breach between Haitians, the host society, and their host government which was bridged by a pair of organizations—Notre Dame and the Toussaint Center—that carved out a space in civil society for Haitians. The political context in the U.S., where voluntary associations have an important role in providing social services and government agencies frequently partner with them, allowed for this particular configuration to arise.

Now let us explore how the Haitian community of Paris, which is much smaller, encounters an environment where Republican ideology discourages ethnic and religious identity that has been so important to Haitians assimilation in Miami.

*Paris: Limited Mediation in Haiti Development*

In the 1950s Haitian students and professionals began migrating to France to study, but until the 1970s, they numbered less than one thousand (Bastide, Morin and Raveau 1974). Despite the historical and cultural ties between Haiti and France, the great geographical distance and restrictive French immigration policy has kept the Haitian community of France relatively small compared to cities in North America. Nonetheless, given the continuous push factors producing out-migration from Haiti the French census counted 25,000 Haitians in metropolitan France by 1999.7

---

Given that France closed its borders to labor migrants in 1973 (Weil 1995), the growth of the Haitian population in France is somewhat surprising. Despite the fact that more attention has been paid to the plight of would-be Haitian refugees in Miami, several sources of data indicate that Haitians have generally not entered France as labor migrants, but rather either under family reunification provisions or as asylum-seekers. Drawing on local government data sources, Delachet-Guillon (1996) calculated that there were over 30,000 Haitians in France in the early 1990s, or nearly twice the 1990 census estimate. Quite unlike Miami, the first Haitians in Paris were very well educated, but by 1999, the data from the French census demonstrate that only a minority of Haitians in France have professional occupations. In fact, the majority of Haitians are concentrated in working-class occupations where unemployment is highest: unemployment among Haitians in France reaches 28.4%. Of those Haitians in France, Haitian community leaders estimate that 20% are undocumented.

Despite quite different immigration policies, the precarious legal status of many Haitians in France and their low levels of human capital suggest that Haitians will likely face many barriers to their successful integration. At the same time, immigrants to France encounter quite a different set of expectations about their cultural adaptation compared to either the U.S. or Canada. Unlike Canadian multiculturalism or the American melting pot, French Republicanism emphasizes a unified national identity based on citizenship and encourages immigrants to replace their identity with French values and culture. In the 1980s, French intellectuals and government officials hotly debated the discourse and practice of French Republicanism. Some groups even began to call for multiculturalism, which was perceived as a challenge to the universalist and egalitarian definition of
French citizenship. In response to unemployment and social exclusion in the French banlieue, in 1981 the government changed its laws to allow foreigners to create associations, and even helped them to do so (Kastoryano 2002; Wenden 1994). Although this might appear to signal a turn away from Republicanism, the report of the High Council on Immigrant Integration cautions against durable ethnic communities that is often associated with the American melting pot or Canadian multiculturalism (Long and l’Haute Conseil pour l’Intégration 1993).

Republicanism represents not just an ideology but a set of policies that influence civil society. For example, until 1981, foreigners in France were not allowed to form their own associations (Horowitz 1992; Lamont 2000). In addition, the strength of Republican ideology in France actually limited the amount of scholarly research on immigrant adaptation in France, producing what the French historian Gérard Noiriel has called “amnesia” with regards to the influence of immigrants on French society (1992). Recent empirical work by scholars such as Michèle Tribalat (1995) and Patrick Simon (2003) suggest that, despite France’s egalitarian ideology, not all immigrants to France fare equally: some immigrants in France encounter discrimination in government agencies and others encounter blocked economic mobility because of racist attitudes. Compared to the United States, however, little is known about whether religious institutions in France mediate with the state on behalf of immigrants.

Because of the French legacy of Republicanism, Figure 1b—which depicts the relationship between civil society, the market and the state—is markedly different in France. Whereas in the United States, one could say that each sphere has a relatively equal size of autonomy, in France, the state is much bigger relative to both the market
and to civil society. Comparative scholars of French and American society, beginning with Alexis de Tocqueville, have often noted the differences between civil society-state relations. Since the French Revolution, the French, quite unlike the United States, have tended to view the state as having more importance in individual lives than civil society. Jean-Pierre Worms has noted, “the fact that France has based the foundations of its national identity, the structure of its civil society and the conditions of its sovereignty on the dignity and power of the state is undisputed by critics and supporters of the French Republican model alike” (Worms 2002, p. 137). These ideologies have an impact on the structure of civil society in France. As Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas (2001) have shown, in countries with a low degree of statism, like the United States, national identity rests more on voluntary and private associations rather than state agencies. As a result, because of France’s higher the degree of statism, there is less voluntarism and fewer nonprofit organizations.

**Figure 1b**

![Diagram showing the interactions between Civil Society, Market, and State](image)

How has the national and local environment shaped the Haitian community of France? First of all, Haitians in France are not nearly as concentrated as in Miami, which makes it harder to organize the ethnic community. Although more than 90% of Haitians
in France live in the Paris region, very few of them live in the city of Paris itself. Rather, nearly all Haitians in Paris live in the banlieue, with the largest concentrations being in Saint-Denis and Val d’Oise.

Although there are many ways in which we could compare the Haitian communities of Miami and Paris, focusing on the same institution in the two cities—the Catholic Church—allows us to isolate factors in the local environment that influence the formation of civil society organizations. In part because of their geographical dispersion, even though many Haitians may continue to attend church in France, the ties between Haitian religious and secular associations are weaker in France than in Miami. Dashed lines represent in Figure 2b represents these weak ties.

![Figure 2b](image)

Quite unlike Miami, even as the size of the Haitian community of Paris has grown, the size of the Haitian Catholic mission has not grown. In 1981, when the size of the total Haitian population in Paris was around 8,000, around 20-30 people founded the Haitian Catholic community. By 2000, the Haitian community in Paris has grown to 22,000 people, but the size of the Haitian Catholic mission has only grown to 300 members. The geographical dispersion of Haitians throughout the Parisian banlieue may be one reason the Haitian Catholic community has not grown at the same rate as the
overall population of Haitians in France. Most Haitians must travel an hour by train and metro to reach St. George’s, a parish in the 18th arrondissement that Haitians share with French parishioners.

But the dispersion of Haitians in Paris is not the only reason for the relatively small size of the Haitian Catholic mission. The leaders of the Haitian Catholic mission have not found enough financial resources to support programs to support families and youth. Whereas Notre Dame in Miami has had several full-time clergy assigned to it since its founding, the Haitian Catholic community of Paris does not have enough funds to pay a full-time salary for a priest. Although lay people continue to be important leaders of the Catholic community, family and work obligations, along with the long distance to travel in order to reach the church, limit the volunteer time they can dedicate to the church.

Comparing the Catholic Church in several different Haitian communities highlights the importance of the unobstructed feedback loop between religious congregations, faith-based nonprofits, and the state depicted in Figure 3 (page 13). Leaders of the Haitian Catholic mission of Paris are concerned about the same social problems as leaders in Miami—legal status, unemployment, language skills, and youth. When the Haitian Catholic mission of Paris was founded, one lay leader—Mr. René Benjamin—also founded a nonprofit association, Haiti Development, to support the integration of Haitians in Paris. However, this organization has fewer ties with the state, which weakens its overall success.

Because so many Haitians arrive in France undocumented, the first priority of Haiti Development is to assist Haitians who are eligible to regularize their status, either
by claiming political asylum, or through special allowances that provide legal rights to undocumented immigrants who have minor children in France. Mr. Benjamin knows that he can build trust among ordinary Haitians by reaching out to them through the Haitian Catholic mission and Haitian Protestant congregations in Paris. Despite the larger size of the French welfare state compared to the United States, Haitian immigrants, especially the undocumented, are more likely to trust a Haitian community association than the state because the leaders of these associations speak Creole, understand their culture and because many Haitians fear being asked for legal papers by French authorities.

The greatest limitation of Haiti Development results from its relatively weak ties to the state. Haiti Development receives some money from the French government to assist asylum seekers with their applications and assists approximately 150 clients a month to submit papers to legalize their status. This funding pays for a few part-time staff, but Mr. Benjamin continues to work as volunteer and lives off his retirement pension. Another difference between France and the United States is that, largely because of the legacy of the French Revolution and the resulting strong state and weak civil society, the institutional Catholic Church, such as the Archdiocese of Paris and Catholic Charities in France, has fewer resources to support organizations like Haiti Development.

How does this different political environment influence the mediating role of the Church, and ultimately, the assimilation of Haitians? Although for many Haitians in Paris, their religious beliefs and religious communities continue to provide important cultural resources, these local-level religious communities have relatively weak ties to secular nonprofits and the state. As a result, both secular Haitian associations and the state, when they offer services to Haitians, are missing a crucial link to the grassroots.
Without the support of religious and community organizations, it is unlikely that Haitians will easily integrate into middle-class, mainstream French society.

The cases of Haitians in Miami and Paris provide stark contrasts with regards to the interaction between religious institutions and the state. Although Haitians arrive in both cities with similar cultural schemas, they encounter different sets of resources within their religious communities. For Haitians in Miami, Notre Dame and the Toussaint Center are two centrally located organizations that provide many links to the state and the host society. However, in Paris, Haitians’ religious institutions remain far removed from both the neighborhoods where Haitians live and the important state agencies that influence assimilation. As a result, the path of assimilation of Haitians in Miami largely follows the American national tradition of strong ethnic communities, whereas Haitians in Paris confront their assimilation challenges without the benefit of a strong mediating institution.

*Haitians in Quebec: The Limits of Multiculturalism*

The Canadian model of immigrant integration falls somewhere in between the American melting pot and French Republicanism. In stark contrast to French Republicanism, the 1998 Multiculturalism Act passed by the Canadian parliament recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society… [Canada] is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada. In Canada, multiculturalism has translated into policies that uphold the rights of immigrants and indigenous minorities (such as Native Americans) to maintain their distinct culture and associations, and the Canadian state plays a central role in supporting
this ethnic diversity through recognition and funding of so-called “cultural communities” and affirmative action policies for visible minorities.

However, many Quebecois did not welcome the Canadian government’s proclamations of multiculturalism because they feared that it equated Quebecois culture with the cultures of recent immigrants. In response, the provincial Quebec government instituted its own policy called interculturalism, which shares many ideas and practices with multiculturalism, but places Quebec culture, the French language and democratic ideals at the core of society (Labelle and Lévy 1995). However, despite its own interculturalism policies, the Quebec government also has limits on its definitions of diversity. For example, the Quebec government prefers to partner with secular voluntary associations to associations that have roots in a religious tradition (the majority of which share Quebec’s Catholic heritage). Canadian multiculturalism, and in particular Quebecois interculturalism leave the state with greater power to define cultural identities than the American melting pot, thereby emphasizing ethnicity over religious identity.

Studying Haitian immigrants in Quebec presents another analytical challenge: although France and the United States may have strong regional cultural differences, the Quebec province has more independence in terms of setting criteria for immigrant entry and in defining programs for immigrant integration. In fact, the large Haitian presence in Montreal resulted from Quebec’s desire to recruit French-speaking immigrants to strengthen the French-speaking bureaucracies (such as in education and health) created during the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s. Returning once again to Figure 1 (page 11), in particular since the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, the state has take a decisive role in shaping civil society institutions in order to preserve and promote French Canadian, or
Quebeois culture. Since the time of the British Reconquest of Quebec in the 18th century, the Catholic Church had preserved French Canadian culture from Anglo-Saxon dominance through its extensive network of schools, service agencies, and leisure activities. However, the Quiet Revolution sought to place religion entirely in the private sphere; as a result of its loss of social importance, religious practice has also plummeted in Quebec (LeMieux and Montminy 2002).

Thus, like Paris but unlike Miami, the Haitian community of Montreal at first was composed of mostly professionals. This first wave of professional immigrants did not rely on the state as a mediator; with their high human capital and warm reception in Quebec, they were able to integrate successfully into the job market and encountered virtually no racial discrimination (Labelle and Midy 1999).

However, an unintended consequence of the recruitment of professional Haitian migrants to Quebec was that, when economic crisis in Haiti deepened in the 1970s, social networks allowed Haitians with lower levels of education and fewer skills to immigrate to Quebec. By the middle of the 1970s, Haiti was the largest source of immigrants to Quebec, sending between 3,000-4,000 immigrants annually, or 10% of Quebec’s total new immigrants (Dejean 1978).

Haitian migrants to Montreal in the 1970s and 1980s encountered an economic recession, in particular in industrial sectors where many Haitian workers were concentrated. Rising unemployment in Montreal also led to changes in immigration policy: after the early 1970s, Haitians were required to have visas to enter Quebec and those who had entered without visas were threatened with deportation. The negative context encountered by this second wave of mostly working class Haitians created a
scenario where, similar to Miami, the Catholic Church emerged as a mediating institution for Haitians in Montreal.

*Montreal’s BCCHM*

When the Canadian government first threatened to deport Haitian immigrants in the late 1970s, several Haitian Catholic priests were already living in Montreal, including priests from two orders that Duvalier expelled from Haiti because of their political mobilization—the Jesuits and the Spiritans. Building on their experience in political movements in Haiti, Haitian Catholic clergy and lay leaders in Montreal created a community organization—*Le Bureau de la Communauté Chrétienne des Haïtiens à Montréal* (BCCHM)—in order to represent the Haitian community and present a united voice to the government.

Despite the fact that religious practice had already begun to decline in Quebec, numerous Catholic institutions had been working on immigrant and refugee issues for many decades. The BCCHM mediated for Haitians before the state because its leaders had a level of knowledge about the local political system that individual immigrants generally do not have, such as by writing letters on behalf of Haitian asylum-seekers and meeting with federal and provincial immigration officials. The BCCHM informed the government about the conditions the migrants would likely face in Haiti if threatened with deportation and argued that the Canadian government’s humanitarian clauses in immigration law justified granting these migrants residency. After several attempts to influence the judiciary and the executive branches, the Canadian Ministry of Immigration did not agree to all the demands the BCCHM put forth—to grant residency to all the Haitians concerned—but they did agree to review the cases individually. About 55% of
the individuals whose cases were reviewed received asylum; the rest returned voluntarily to Haiti or were deported (Miller 1984).

In the early 1980s, the BCCHM organized another legalization campaign, once again relying on social networks to influence the government. At the time of this second campaign, a Jesuit priest, Father Jacques Couteau, was Minister of Immigration for Quebec. Father Couteau asked another Jesuit from Quebec, Father Paul Harvey, to write a report assessing the situation of undocumented Haitians in Quebec, such as their numbers, places of settlement, and places of employment. Father Harvey relied on his personal networks with Haitians, in particular Carl Levesque, a Haitian Jesuit who had helped found the BCCHM, to facilitate contacts with Haitian associations and individuals to write this report. Harvey’s report led to the regularization of about 4,000 Haitians (Miller 1984; Morin 1993).

The BCCHM’s ethnic and religious identity generated trust among Haitians in a way that a state agency could not, thus allowing it to mobilize resources from the Haitian community as well as attract outside resources for its social programs. Like Miami’s Toussaint Center, the BCCHM’s combined volunteer work and state funding. For example, relying on volunteer work, the BCCHM offered French language training to Haitian immigrants. In order to expand the program, the BCCHM had to explain to the Quebec government that not all Haitians speak French. When many Haitians were failing out of French literacy classes, the BCCHM began to teach a Creole literacy class. In order to start these programs, the BCCHM attracted volunteer work from the Haitian community and financial resources from Catholic organizations.
The mediating role of the BCCHM began to change in the mid-1980s. According to the President of Quebec’s Council for Inter-Cultural Relations, the Quebec government has declared its preference to fund multi-ethnic, secular associations rather than associations with ethnic or religious identities. As a result, the director of the BCCHM removed the word Christian from its name to prevent a possible misinterpretation that they only offered services to people who identify themselves as Christians and to increase their chances of attaining government funding. In an environment hostile to religious groups participating in civil society, it is unlikely that the BCCHM will recover its former mediating role in the Haitian community. Figure 2 (page 12), which had solid lines in Miami and dashed lines in Paris, has an all but invisible line in the case of Montreal.

The secular climate in Quebec means not only weakened government support of religious nonprofits, but also the institutional Catholic Church has fewer resources to help immigrants. Although the Archdiocese helped the BCCHM begin its operations, its resources are more limited than the Archdiocese of Miami. Brian McDonough, the director of the Archdiocese of Montreal’s Office of Social Affairs explained that in Quebec, the concept of a modern welfare state greatly reduces the perception of the need for a public role for the Church. As a result, he says,

The Catholic Church in Quebec had a very, very different mission in 1841 than it had in 1950 and then following the Quiet Revolution in the early sixties. That change in [the Church’s] self-understanding and the understanding of its mission means that the role of the Church in welcoming and also accompanying immigrant communities has changed. And, of course, that has a very real impact on the way the Church develops ties with the various waves of immigrants from Haiti, the services that the Church might seek to offer and the kinds of needs the Church might seek to meet and also its own expectations from the different waves of immigrants from Haiti.

---

8 The Québec government officially pronounced this policy in 2001, confirming a long-standing practice of preferring secular associations to religious-based associations.
Despite many attempts by Catholic clergy and lay leaders to develop programs to support Haitians’ adaptation, the lack of external resources from the state or from the local Archdiocese has limited their success. This case of Haitians in Montreal highlights how church resources alone are not sufficient to help immigrants overcome barriers to their adaptation. The comparison of the three cases leads me to the central argument I have presented here: *Religious groups can be most successful at promoting immigrant adaptation both when they mobilize resources within the community and when they link immigrants to external resources.*

A lack of financial resources in the institutional Catholic Church in Montreal also partially explains the small size of the Haitian Catholic mission of Montreal, also called Notre Dame d’Haiti. According to the pastor of Notre Dame in Montreal, the Haitian Catholic mission has not received any financial support from the Archdiocese since its first few years of operation. Attracting Haitians to the Catholic Church in Montreal has proved more difficult, in part because of the more secular climate in Montreal and also because of the Church’s fewer resources in Montreal.

As I mentioned in the case of Miami, the Church became a successful mediator for Haitians in part because of its outreach to incorporate immigrants into local church structures in the United States, what the sociologists of religion Finke and Stark (1992) have called the “churching” of immigrants. Whereas the Catholic Church in Miami has successfully “churched” Haitians by creating an all-Haitian ethnic parish and a set of inter-related ministries for Haitians, many Haitians who arrive in Montreal do not appear to continue their religious practice. Even though the size Haitian community has grown from around 30,000 in 1982 to around 80,000 by 2001, Notre Dame d’Haiti in Montreal
has had the same size membership—around 500 people since it was founded. Volunteers are limited in their ability to run programs at Notre Dame because of a lack of funds and a great distance from their residence to the church. As a result, Notre Dame has not been able to keep many young adults active in the church past high school. The fact that many young adults stop attending church makes it difficult for the church community to provide social closure around Haitians’ ethnic ties that would help the youth face problems of school failure and unemployment. Although for the Haitian immigrants in the 1970s and 1980s, the church offered a mediating structure with the host society and government, these ties have been weakened by government policies. However, there is no evidence that weakening the church’s mediation has promoted the assimilation of Haitians. Rather, it appears that new Haitian arrivals in Montreal and second and third generation Haitians will face their integration in an increasingly difficult climate but largely without the benefit of mediating institutions.

In Miami, the overall religious context and political structures enable the Church to mediate for immigrants, but in Montreal, the Quiet Revolution has progressively attempted to replace the Church’s role in society with the welfare state. Because of the growing chasm between religious institutions and the state in Quebec, it is not clear that religious leaders in Montreal will find needed external provisions for their efforts to support the adaptation of Haitian youth or newly arriving Haitian immigrants.

Conclusions

I have highlighted here how a cross-national comparative approach to religion and assimilation calls our attention to the national political traditions that influence the interaction between civil society and the state. Conceiving of religious institutions as part
of civil society clearly places them in the public rather than private sphere. Despite the fact that, in some form or another, in secular Western states religious institutions mediate between individuals and the state, this mediating role is nonetheless influenced by national political traditions.

One of the most important differences in the three cases I have examined here is that, in the United States, faith-based community associations such as the Toussaint Center can expand their activities through access to government funding. Similar institutions in Paris and Montreal, namely Haiti Development and the BCCHM, must struggle harder to keep their doors open because of a lack of external funding. Although similar volunteer work and community resources were indispensable to founding these three organizations, their long-term success depends on at least partial state funding for their programs assisting assimilation. These differences in government funding for religious-based associations largely stem from different national configurations of state-civil society relations.

Although I have only briefly described some of the internal differences in the Haitian communities of the three cities, we should note that my comparison also highlights the different scenarios encountered by a highly concentrated immigrant group—such as Haitians in Miami—compared to a disperse group—such as Haitians in Paris. In Miami, Notre Dame and the Toussaint Center serve as a tightly linked community center for all Haitians, regardless of religious belief or practice. In Paris, the Haitian Catholic mission and Haiti Development are not only far from each other but far from where most Haitians live, thus limiting their impact in the community. Although, from the perspective of French Republicanism, the dispersion of an ethnic group may be
advantageous to assimilation, it is not clear that French society or the state can replace the
ethnic solidarity that immigrants themselves can form in religious communities.
Similarly, in Montreal, because of the state’s reticence to cooperate with religious
institutions, greater state involvement in the Haitian community results in breaking down
immigrants own ties of ethnic solidarity.

The major contribution of this present paper has been to present a theoretical
framework for understanding the inter-dependence of the state and religious
organizations in immigrant assimilation. One weakness of the theory I present here is that
it emerges from what could be thought of as a photograph of the three communities taken
at one point in time. Although I have interpreted this photograph with the help of
historical information as well as census and immigration data, a major step for
researchers interested in comparing assimilation outcomes could be to generate
comparable survey data that follows immigrants across time in different countries. This
kind of data would allow us to test the relative importance of religious-based social ties
and religious beliefs on important assimilation outcomes such as work, education and
political participation.
References


